

# Ensuring Project Success

Every project is an opportunity for success. No organization starts a system integration or upgrade with the goal of failure. But there are a few things you can do to improve your chances for achieving your goals with as little drama as possible. Some of these ideas may seem obvious, but it's still valuable to underline good practices of project development.

An easy way to look at this is in broad categories:

**Planning**  
**Execution**  
**Communication**



Integrating people, process and IT

**[www.rpesolutions.com](http://www.rpesolutions.com)** ■ **813-490-7000 Ext. 7353**  
**[info@rpesolutions.com](mailto:info@rpesolutions.com)**



## Plan the Project You Want

What is the goal of the project? It's easy to say, "Make things better," but what are the specific metrics of success? Do you want to improve employee efficiency? Do you want to decrease store out of stocks? Are you executing a transition to meet some overall business need, like an acquisition? Line up your specific goals and set your project up to meet those goals. And don't forget to include sufficient time for testing and training. The new abilities that the project will be delivering are the exciting part, but if they don't work, or people don't know how they work, the final product won't be successful.

One key to setting the scope of the project is to ensure that the business partners that are most directly involved are included in the planning up front, that they are on the same page with what you're trying to accomplish. They may have input on timing. When should a project start? Alternatively, when should it not start? Who needs to be involved? They need to buy in from the jump and understand their role as cheerleaders for the project.

Now that you have the stakeholders involved and a clear set of goals, ensure you have a realistic timeline for completion. Your project team has only so many bodies and hours in the day to complete their work. Understand the limitations and set expectations as soon as possible. Don't forget to plan for the unknown. Every project will have its unexpected occurrences. A timeline that has no cushion for issue resolution, for vacations, for holidays, for staff changes, will often lead to problems down the road.

When everyone has a clear, realistic picture of the target date for completion, achieving that date is going to be easier.

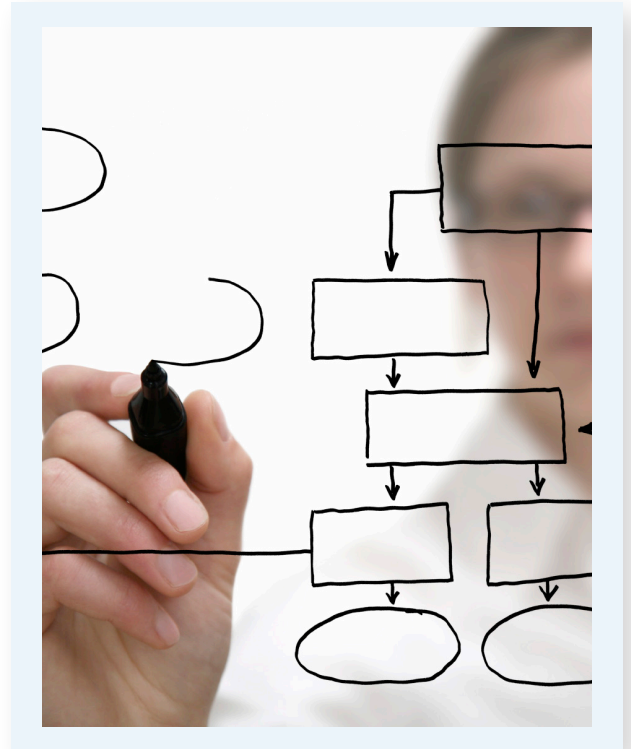
If outside factors require that you push up a completion date, do not simply change the date on the plan and hope for the best. Some aspect of the scope must change. Does a difference of a month in your timeline mean you have to remove or alter one of your project goals? Does it mean you need to bring in more bodies? Something has to give. Make sure what you change is not going to cause other knock-on effects, and that your changes are clearly communicated and agreed upon by the team.

The final point in the planning sequence: communication. The very first deliverable of a project is the project plan. The project team needs to understand the plan thoroughly, and make their concerns known if they have any. This is often handled through regular weekly (or some other cadence) meetings with the key members of the team.

The preparations are complete. Now it's time to get things done.

## Execute the Project You Need

Communication was the last point in planning, and it's the first point in execution. Those status meetings already discussed will be invaluable in keeping everyone in the loop as milestones are achieved or as obstacles appear. It is easy to let the IT group drive the project, but in a vacuum that can lead to results that the business will dislike or even reject. The business stakeholders need to understand what's happening as it happens. Their input is necessary to ensure they get the results they want.



Status meetings are a part of communication, but maintaining a log of ongoing issues, questions and concerns is vital to success. It gives the team a day-by-day road map of what they need to work on that isn't already in the plan. Decisions that come out of status meetings and from working out issues should be documented and dispersed to the project team. This is valuable to keep your team apprised of changes, and as a record for any new team members that may need to join the project as it continues.

As steps are completed and aspects of the project are made ready, quality assurance testing is next. Your plan has time allotted to these tasks, and they cannot be given short shrift. Thorough testing and documentation of that testing serves several purposes. The first and most obvious is the validation of the new project deliverable. But this also serves as an indicator to the user community that this project is trustworthy. It serves as a roadmap for training the users in the system's usage. And it serves as the first draft of testing for any future enhancements. A clear and precise test plan saves time and money today and tomorrow.

Inevitably, as the project is underway, there will be pressure to make course corrections. These might come from the business as new functionality requests, or these might come from the IT group as alternate approaches to obstacle that arise. Don't let these changes damage your ability to meet your original goals. If a new approach or a new feature can be incorporated into the current plan with no change in timeline or resources, that may be just fine. However, when the change to the plan does have an impact to time, risk or cost, it's crucial for you to provide the team the impact of the change, and for the stakeholders to agree that the impact is worth the benefits. Don't let "scope creep" derail your project.



## Communicate for Project Success

What do all these ideas have in common? What is the one thing, more than any other, that will ensure project success?

Communication.

If your business stakeholders tell you what they want, and if you tell them how much it will cost and how long it will take, that is the foundation of a solid project plan.

If you have regular status meetings on the state of the project, and document the successes and obstacles as they occur, you can keep the project on track.

If you make the user community aware of the changes, and train them appropriately, your hard work will yield actual results.

Keeping the lines of communication open ensures that the three groups of people involved in the project (the stakeholders, the delivery team, and the end users) are all working in lockstep to make your project as successful as it can be.